

Courtesy Walter Grubb

THE KING'S ACADEMY: HARRISON-CHILHOWEE ACADEMY

Walter Grubb

Nestled in the rolling foothills of the Great Smoky Mountains of East Tennessee, one of Southern Baptists' longest-standing, albeit lesser known, educational institutions goes about its task of equipping young people for service to the cause of Christ as it has for well over a century. Harrison-Chilhowee Baptist Academy, founded in 1880, stands today for what it has always stood for—leading children and young adults into relationship with Christ and building them up for the challenges of becoming productive citizens, scholars and servants in a culturally diverse world.

The academy is one of three educational institutions affiliated with the Tennessee Baptist Convention. The Convention elects the academy's twenty-one-member Board of Trustees and provides approximately 13 percent of the academy's annual operating budget from Cooperative Program funds. The state convention also supports Carson-Newman College in Jefferson City and Union University in Jackson. The academy's TBC relationship has been continuous since 1932.

Today, Harrison-Chilhowee actually serves as the parent corporation of three divisions. In 1993 the academy's board of trustees authorized the use of the name

"The King's Academy" for its elementary and secondary school division. Day students are enrolled in pre-kindergarten through grade 12, and boarding students are accepted in grades 7–12. Ap-

proximately 400 students enroll each year in The King's Academy, with around sixty-five of these students living on campus as boarding students. Generally twelve to fifteen countries are represented in the student body.

The academy's identity is now firmly established in the local area as The King's Academy, although alumni and convention officers typically refer to the school as the corporate entity Harrison-Chilhowee. For the purpose of this article, The King's



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Academy will be used as the primary identifier.

The other two divisions under the HCBA corporate umbrella are the Bible Training Center and the Chilhowee Retreat Center. The Bible Training Center is an approved Southern Baptist Convention Seminary Extension Center with a curriculum designed for the bi-vocational minister. The BTC offers the Diploma in Biblical Studies in a four-year course of study with classes meeting Saturday mornings. The Chilhowee Retreat Center provides housing, food service, meeting space and recreational facilities to churches and schools for retreats, conferences and camps, primarily during the summer months.

A plaque citing Psalm 127:1 hangs prominently in academy president's office: "Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it." A survey of the academy's history gives evidence that God has sustained the academy and blessed its efforts to raise up one godly generation after another. It is apparent that God's provision has come at crucial times and in supernatural ways—hence the more recent identity, The "King's" Academy.

The school's story can best be illustrated in terms of people—hard-working folks who, by God's grace, brought into reality a dynamic vision of educational excellence for children and young adults. These are the founders, trustees, administrators, teachers and staff who have served and continue to serve as stewards of the legacy of quality Christian education. They are the parents and students from near and far who have taken and continue to take advantage of the benefits the academy offers. That list also certainly includes the alumni, churches and friends whose financial support has made it possible to extend the academy's mission to the children and youth of the world.

The academy story is a story of people. It is a story that can-

not be told without revealing the impact the people of this distinctively Christian school have had on each other and the world. It has been a great work of God to assemble the people who have made up the fabric of academy life.

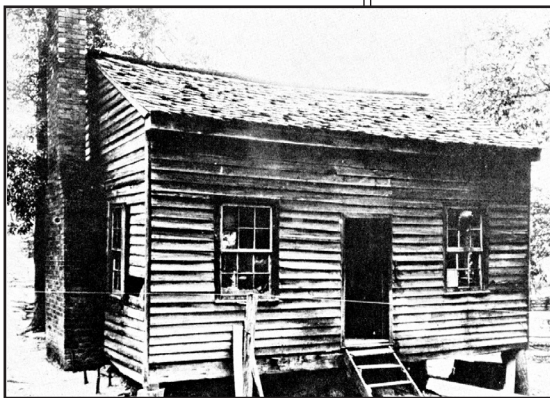
To know the academy, one must understand the passion of East Tennessee farmers in the late 1800s and the evangelistic spirit of the people who launched and led the institution. The academy's roots draw from the rich Tennessee soil in the mid-nineteenth century. Farmers who settled in the scenic and fertile foothills between the Tennessee River Valley and the southern Appalachian Mountains wanted an excellent education for their children.

As a result, a school began to operate in the 1840s near the headwaters of Boyds Creek in Sevier County, not far from the Blount and Knox County lines. That log cabin structure was known as Owl College in its day, although the basis of that reference is lost. It is conjectured that the students studied late into the night or that they grew wise as owls.

The year 1880 is given as the official organization date of what was initially called Boyds Creek Academy, although students did not enroll in the new school until the fall of 1881. In honor of a donation of land by Harrison Ellis in 1884, the school was renamed Harrison Seminary. Churches of the nearby Chilhowee and Sevier County Baptist Associations began to provide financial support to the academy in 1887 and 1888, respectively, and the Board of Trustees subsequently changed the name to Harrison-Chilhowee Institute.¹

From the beginning, facilities were provided for students who had to travel considerable distance to go to school. By 1889 a girls dormitory and several cottages were constructed. The first boys dorm was completed in 1908. For decades, many of the students were ministers returning to school after sensing God's call on their lives. They came to get a high school diploma and prepare for college and seminary education. Some had families with them. The academy's "Preacher Street" developed as a cottage community where these families lived.

Early documents indicate the academy stressed Christian principles throughout its curriculum and activities. Although it



William F. Hall Sr., *A Venture of Faith* (Rogersville, Tenn.: East Tennessee Printing Co., Inc., 1980), 21.

Owl College

had distinct Baptist connections, an early brochure made it clear that “the school excludes none but rather invites all.”

The academy mission has always been evangelistic in that non-Christian students have been invited to attend, provided they meet all criteria for admission and are open-minded toward considering a relationship with Christ. Many students have embraced Christianity in this environment.

The Home Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, bearing a burden for the people of the vast southern Appalachian Mountains, maintained a Mountain Mission School ministry that included a relationship with “Chilhowee Institute” from 1905 until 1929. This mountain school network, which received financial assistance from the Home Mission Board, included the following schools in Tennessee in addition to Harrison-Chilhowee: Smoky Mountain Academy (near Sevierville), Cosby Academy (Cosby Valley), Watauga Academy (Butler), Doyle College (Middle Tennessee), Andersonville Institute (Andersonville), Stoctons Valley Academy (Helena). Unaka Academy (Erwin). Some of these schools merged into public school systems. Only Harrison-Chilhowee endures as a distinct entity today.²



<http://www.cityofknoxville.org/mayors/default.asp>. Used by permission.

Ben A. Morton
Mayor of Knoxville
1924-27

Distinguished graduates in the early days of the academy include Knoxville Mayor Ben A. Morton (1924–27) and Dr. G. C. Bull,

Head of Immunology at Johns Hopkins Uni-

versity. Bull is credited with developing a serum for the prevention of tetanus and administered his serum to troops in France in World War I for the treatment of gangrene and trench fever.

The Home Mission Board decided to get out of the mountain school business in 1929, prompting concern on the part of the academy's board. Roy Anderson accepted the role as principal that year, leaving a similar position at Etowah High School. As these changes occurred in the throes of the Great Depression, to say times were challenging would be an understatement.

When asked by a Knoxville *News Journal* reporter in 1942 why he chose to accept such a responsibility at that time, Anderson replied, “I get a big kick out of taking a boy or girl that hasn't a chance in the world, and then getting somebody that is interested in helping worthy folk to invest some money in their future.”³

It was Anderson who led the process of establishing a new

charter for the academy in 1932 and establishing its affiliate relationship with the Tennessee Baptist Convention. At that time, the school's identity became established as Harrison-Chilhowee Baptist Academy. Anderson was the first administrator given the title "President" that same year. He served in that capacity until his retirement in 1951.

One of the motivating factors for local farmers to establish the academy in the 1880s had been the absence of any school in the area now known as Seymour. The Sevier County Board of Education did not have a public school in this part of the county until the mid 1900s. Through a unique public/private school partnership, the county paid the academy to teach its "public" students. For a public school system to pay a Christian school to teach its "public" students represents a chapter in American education history that is not likely to be repeated.

Elementary students ceased to attend the academy in 1947 when Seymour Primary School was constructed on land formerly owned by the academy. At that point, the academy began to offer only grades 8–12.

The academy faced a serious crisis when Sevier County announced plans to construct Seymour High School in the late 1950s. With a large portion of the academy's revenue coming from the local school board, many anticipated the academy would, and should, close its doors. A strong movement within the Tennessee Baptist Convention arose to close the academy. But the academy had touched many lives over the years and loyalties were strong in support of continuing the academy than were those who wanted to close it.

A Tennessee Baptist Convention Survey Committee brought a recommendation to the November 1959 Tennessee Baptist Convention meeting in Gatlinburg requesting "the discontinuing of Harrison-Chilhowee." The recommendation was based heavily on the fact that "47.7 percent of the 1959–60 enrollment are public school pupils of Sevier County and when the public school pupils are taken out in 1962 . . . the enrollment



Courtesy of Walter Grubb

The Anderson Building, constructed in 1947 and named for Roy Anderson, academy president from 1932 to 1951. The Anderson Building is the main building, with nine classrooms and several administrative offices.

will drop.”⁴

Discussions were lengthy on the convention floor. Following a passionate appeal and the proposal of a substitute motion by academy Bible Teacher William F. Hall, the convention voted 463 to 457 to form a committee to study the ministry of the academy. By six votes, the academy survived.

The following January 1960 Academy President Stuart Rule resigned after leading the institution through most of the 1950s. Academy graduate and Knoxville pastor Charles Lemons assumed the role of president later that year.

Similar to Roy Anderson in 1929, Lemons took office with a serious cloud over the academy. And, similar to Anderson, Lemons had a passion for the task. He stated in the school catalog, “Chilhowee seeks to justify its existence through its product. The presence of and service of ministers, doctors, missionaries, business men, home-makers, teachers, and others active in the work of the church and the community all over Tennessee and other states attest to the reality of the place and the usefulness of Chilhowee Academy in our denomination and in the life of our day and generation.”⁵



Courtesy of Walter Grubb

In the mid-1970s academy trustee and late Gatlinburg businessman Luther Ogle donated it to the academy. The building was named in Ogle's honor. It was renovated in the late 1990s and now houses offices and almost 200 students.

Again, testifying to the provision of God, over the next decade, without the benefit of the public-supported Sevier County students, Lemons led the academy in unprecedented growth. He was a phenomenal developer, leading in the construction of Stokely Gymnasium, Ashe Cafeteria, Atchley Dormitory for Girls, Schubert Dormitory for Boys, and the Hasson Activities Building during the 1960s.

Seymour High School was constructed near the academy in 1961, and Sevier County stopped its subsidy to the academy at that time. There was expected tension in the community as local students had to choose between attending the free local public high school and the school they had been attending. That tension gradually subsided with the passing of time, and today the academy has a good relationship with its public school colleagues in the adjacent Seymour Primary School, Seymour Intermediate School, Seymour Middle School and Seymour High School. With five schools in one of the fastest growing communities in Tennes-

see, with the schools all within a few hundred yards of each other, and with all five schools served by the two-lane Boyds Creek Highway, visitors would be wise to avoid the school day traffic congestion around 8:00 a.m. and 3:00 p.m.

Seymour Primary School relocated in new facilities in the early 1960s and the original public school building that sat just behind the academy's classroom/administration building was vacated. That property sat empty until 1976, when Gatlinburg businessman and academy trustee Luther Ogle purchased the property from the county and donated it back to the academy.

Alumnus Hubert Smothers, Director of the Service Division of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board, was named president of the academy in 1970, following Charles Lemons' request to serve the academy in a capacity other than president. Smothers was already well known throughout Tennessee, and his reputation as a champion of his alma mater was strong. He led in the establishment of a unique ministry to deaf students and oversaw the school's initial accreditation with the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. The academy was the first school in Sevier County to achieve SACS accreditation status.

Smothers' tenure as president ended abruptly New Year's Eve 1984 when he perished in a fire in the president's house on campus. The Smothers family had gone to bed when an apparent spark from the fireplace started the inferno. Mr. Smothers was out of the house once, but he went back in apparently to search for a child. The entire academy family and the community was devastated by the loss.

Trustee Jane Schubert Ellison of Knoxville provided administrative leadership until William Palmer, former president of the Tennessee Baptist Convention, took office as academy president at mid-year. Palmer's strong relationships with state Baptist leaders fostered good will between the academy and TBC. However, when hints of Dr. Palmer's retirement began to surface in 1992, another challenge to the academy's existence within the Tennessee Baptist Convention arose.

With enrollment hovering around 100 students, Cooperative Program support was reduced 35% following heated debate at the 1992 November Tennessee Baptist Convention meeting in Gatlinburg. Many academy insiders felt this action was the beginning of the end of the convention relationship.

A consulting firm recommended the academy prepare for its independence. A member of the consulting team, Michael Beane of Dallas, Texas, suggested himself as Palmer's succes-



William F. Hall Sr., *A Venture of Faith* (Rogersville, Tenn.: East Tennessee Printing Co., Inc., 1980), 204.

Hubert Smothers

sor. A somewhat desperate Board of Trustees quickly accepted the offer.

Beane brought a considerable amount of fresh energy to the academy, along with several friends. His new ideas—including the concept of “The King’s Academy”—were rapidly embraced by many, and, for a few months, there was hope within the academy and community that the school was about to earn a place “on the map.”



William F. Hall Sr., *A Venture of Faith* (Rogersville, Tenn.: East Tennessee Printing Co., Inc., 1980), 204.

Charles C. Lemons
President 1960–70

However, Beane soon ran into conflict with practically every group he encountered, particularly leaders of the Tennessee Baptist Convention and the Tennessee Secondary School Athletic Association. Soon the tension permeated his relationship with the Board of Trustees, and the divorce was unavoidable. Following fifteen months in office and an audit reflecting roughly \$700,000 in deficit spending during that time, Beane and the Board abruptly parted company in March 1994.

The author had been serving as academic principal from 1987 until that time. After first agreeing to serve as interim president, the permanent position as president was offered and accepted in May 1994. With God’s grace, the relationship with the state athletic association was restored upon appeal, and the convention/academy partnership has been reaffirmed. Confidence has grown in the academy’s ministry throughout the state. A covenant relationship between the TBC and the academy was adopted in 2005.

Citing the examples of Roy Anderson and Charles Lemons, when someone assumes leadership in the midst of such a crisis, there is only one way to go—up.

Three of the countless ideas from the Beane era survive in concept if not in practice. First, the restructuring and The King’s Academy name has stuck. Second, the idea of using a portion of the sixty-seven-acre campus for an alternative income generating venture, such as a conference center, continues to be considered. Third, it became evident that the academy should establish its own feeder school by adding an elementary division to its offerings.

In 1995 the academy administration and board began to give serious consideration to adding elementary grades. The former Seymour Primary School building was the obvious location. However, most of the building was constructed in 1947. Almost all of it had sat empty since the early 1960s.

Led by retired mechanical engineer-extreme volunteer Charles Guthrey of Knoxville, an army of volunteers workers from fifteen states renovated the old public school building in

three phases. The restoration task of the 22,000 square foot facility was accomplished for approximately \$42 per foot, about one-third of what it would have cost normally.

Elementary grades were added in fall 1996, and enrollment has grown significantly since that time. For three decades prior, the annual enrollment averaged slightly more than 100. In the years since, around four times that number matriculate annually.

One distinctive of academy life immediately obvious to visitors is the ethnic diversity on the campus. In 1935 the academy enrolled its first international students, two brothers from Cuba. Primitivo and Marcelo Delgado began an era of international mission outreach that continues to this day as hundreds of students from all over the world have attended the academy. Dr. Primitivo

Delgado passed away recently after his tenure as Academic Dean of Bluefield College in Bluefield, West Virginia. His brother Marcelo died in 1961.

Several Cuban students attended the academy while there was a window of opportunity in which Cuban students were free to come to the United States to attend school. That window is now closed.

In recent years students have come from unexpected places at crucial times of international crises. A boy from Bosnia arrived just before the civil war broke out there. He was cut off from his parents for three years and the academy became his family during that time. Twin girls from Rwanda attended the academy and watched on television as their home country became embroiled in civil war. A boy from Liberia escaped the poverty and civil strife in his country and completed his secondary education here.

A son and daughter of a Communist Party official in the People's Republic of China attended the academy. Both students became Christians during their first semesters. The son now operates his own international steel fabrication business with headquarters in Shanghai, China. His sister is systems engineer for Stanford University Medical Center.

Recently, a young man arrived from Pakistan. He is an



William F. Hall Sr., *A Venture of Faith* (Rogersville, Tenn.: East Tennessee Printing Co., Inc., 1980), 203.

Hasson Student Activities Building, 1967

Afghan citizen who had lived all his life in the Peshawar refugee camp. He expressed openness to considering Christianity, but he made the stakes clear, as he shared that if he returns to his home as a Christian, he may face execution.

Today, in the classrooms of the academy, it is not uncommon to see two students, whose home countries may be in conflict with each other, working together on class projects.

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What a rare opportunity these internationals provide Americans! Members of the academy "family" can honestly say they have friends around the world and can speak confidently of their firsthand awareness of many different cultures.

The academy has provided a quality education for day students in the surrounding areas for 129 years. Today that tradition has never been stronger. Additionally, boarding students from over 70 different nations and most of the states in the U. S. have studied here. Graduates frequently comment on interacting with such a diverse student body as one of the most valuable experiences in their lives.

Only God could bring such a diverse group of people together. His hand is obviously on the academy and He continues to bring the world to the academy's door. Many international students return to their home countries as ambassadors for Christ.

The school and its faculty have historically been solidly committed to the discipleship of young believers, acknowledging this as a primary purpose and function. High school graduates in the United States generally have a well-developed worldview by the time they go to college, although many of them are unable to articulate what they believe and why. The academy's challenge is for its graduates to embrace biblically based values and articulate a clear and convincing defense of their faith.

To accomplish this, the academy sees its mission as more than adding Bible to a standard college preparatory curriculum. A Christian school experience should involve more than requiring students attend chapel. Boarding students should be aware that there is more to a Christian environment than Sunday church attendance.

A pervasive biblical worldview requires that every aspect of the curriculum be taught and learned from a Christian perspective. Language takes on a richer meaning when it is seen as a divine gift that enables people to communicate with God and others more effectively. The content in a social studies class takes on a whole new meaning when God's hand in history is revealed. Science becomes personal and meaningful when creation is studied as God's handiwork. Individuals have a greater awareness of their intrinsic value when they understand they can have a relationship with their Creator.

The academy prepares students for college with age appropriate experiences designed to help them discover who they are in relationship with a loving and personal God through His Son, Jesus Christ.

The academy has always prepared students to go to college. In the earliest years, a specialized program was also available to those who desired to become teachers. Today, from the kindergarten curriculum to the advanced calculus course high school students take for college credit, everything about the academy is designed to prepare students for further study.

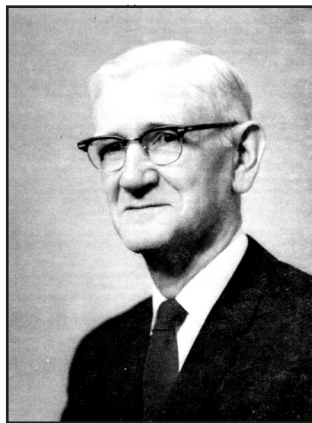
But a student is not merely in the process of becoming. Each student is someone of importance, with a God-designed mission in life. In a comprehensive academic environment, the academy immerses students in an atmosphere where they discover and engage their talents in fine arts, language, athletics, and other disciplines. The well-rounded academy student who develops academically, emotionally, physically, socially, and spiritually is well prepared for the challenge of a university experience.

Through gifts of adjacent land and strategic purchases, the campus grew from a fraction of an acre in 1880 to today's spacious sixty-seven-acre layout that includes ample space for expansion. In addition to twelve major classroom, administration or activities buildings, there are twelve houses on campus for administration and faculty to provide a community atmosphere for boarding students.

The academy has always been considered an experience in faith. The late William F. Hall, who came to teach Bible at the academy in 1926, authored a centennial history of the school in 1980. He subtitled his work, *A Venture of Faith*.

This lengthy work chronicles the academy's first 100 years, its struggles and triumphs. Woven throughout the book is the evidence of God's provision. Through the days of the Great Depression and periodic financial uncertainty, God has consistently worked through individuals, churches, businesses and foundations to provide needed support.

The academy does not take any form of federal or state government support. The academy's position on this matter precludes any such funds that may compromise its academic freedom and Christian atmosphere. While the academy does not discriminate on the basis of race, sex, or ethnic origin in any of its programs or services, it does retain the right to appoint teachers and other personnel who are committed to a biblical worldview.



William F. Hall Sr., *A Venture of Faith* (Rogersville, Tenn.: East Tennessee Printing Co., Inc., 1980), vii.

William F. Hall Sr.



William F. Hall Sr., *A Venture of Faith* (Rogersville, Tenn.: East Tennessee Printing Co., Inc., 1980), 283

First Football Team, 1929

The King's Academy operates on an extremely tight budget. Resourceful teachers, creative staff members and generous parents and friends provide many of the extras needed for classroom projects and student activities.

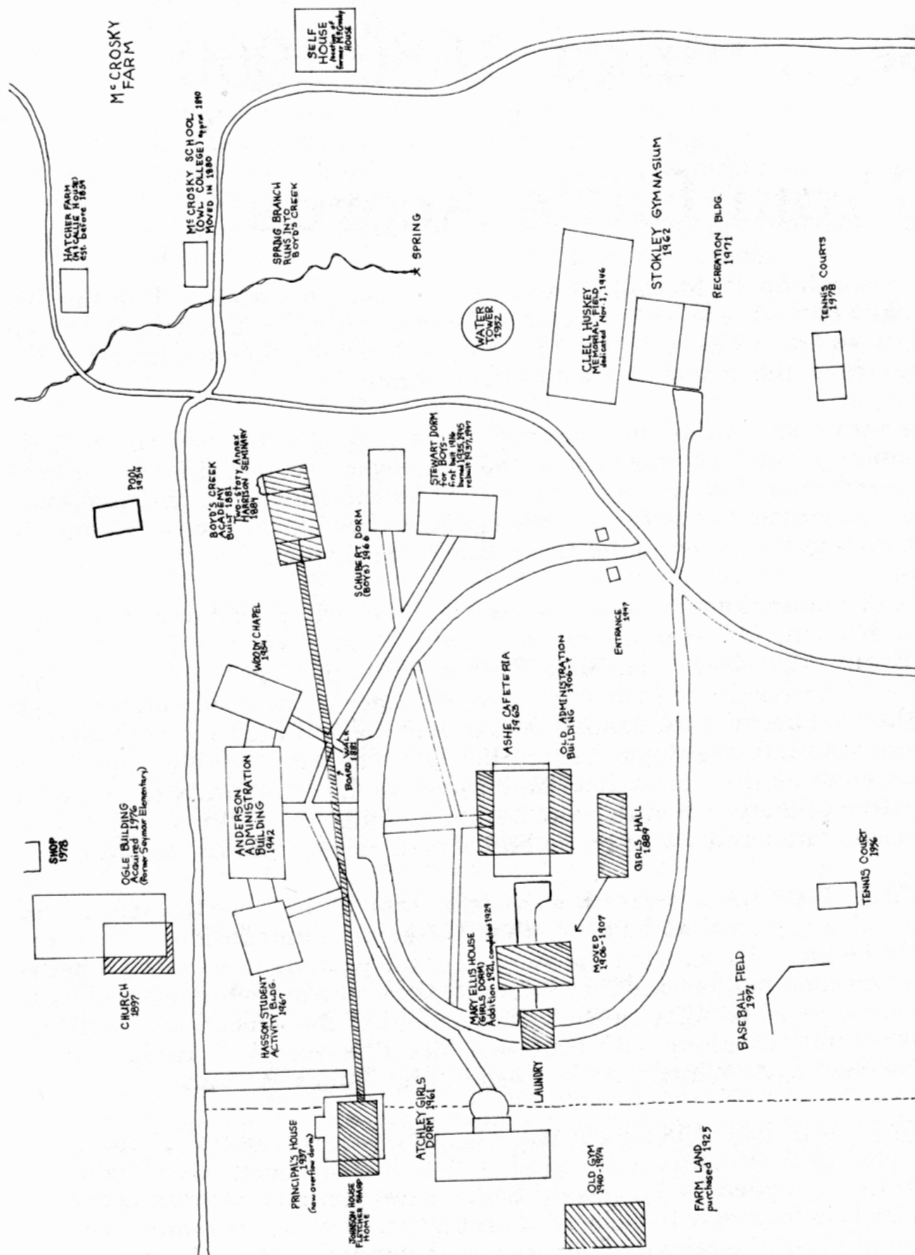
Many families attracted to The King's Academy cannot afford the actual costs of tuition, room, and board. To address this issue and maintain a commitment to children, regardless of their ability to pay, approximately 10 percent of the academy's annual budget is designated for student aid. This amount is very much appreciated by those who receive it, but it does not begin to meet all the need. Many students are unable to attend The King's Academy simply because the financial aid fund is not substantial enough to include them.

During a two-day retreat in 2002, academy trustees reviewed the school's purpose and developed a mission statement. That statement was reaffirmed verbatim in 2007 and was used as the springboard for a comprehensive strategic process to guide the academy into the future. That mission statement is:

The King's Academy is a Christ-centered day and boarding school reaching local, national, and international students of all socioeconomic backgrounds, educating and preparing them academically, emotionally, physically, socially, and spiritually for the twenty-first century.

The strategic process, conducted throughout the 2007–2008 school year, and ongoing, has established four major goal areas for the academy:

- Recruitment and Retention of Outstanding Faculty
- Renovation of Existing Buildings and Construction of New Facilities
- Stewardship of Available Resources and Development of Additional Sources of Finances
- Development of Proper Christian Focus Throughout Cam-



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pus and All Academy Programs

Coinciding with this strategic plan, the academy affirmed the core values as its guiding principles in all its practices:

- Faith in God
- Christ-Centered Vision
- Christ-like Character
- Christian Community
- Excellence in Christ

For this small Baptist school to have endured as it has, with alumni now all over the world, and with the success of its current program, it is apparent God's hand is upon it. By God's grace, it will continue to build students into citizens, scholars and servants for the cause of Christ.

Notes

Walter Grubb is president, Harrison-Chilhowee Baptist Academy, dba The King's Academy, Seymour, Tennessee.

1. William F. Hall Sr., *A Venture of Faith: History of Harrison-Chilhowee Baptist Academy* (Rogersville, Tenn.: East Tennessee Printing Co., Inc., , 1980), 19–31.
2. J. W. O'Hara, *Signal Fires on the Mountain* (Nashville: Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1929), 52–57.
3. Hall, 87.
4. *Minutes*, Tennessee Baptist Convention, 1959, 33–35; *Baptist & Reflector*, 24 September 1959, 12–13.
5. *Catalog*, Harrison-Chilhowee Baptist Academy, 1959–60, 9.